

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE AMHERST SCHOOLS
Fiscal Year 2004

Amherst School Committee

Elaine Brighty, Chair

Tony Rogers, Vice-Chair term ended on March 30, 2004

Alisa Brewer, Secretary Vice-Chair as of April, 2004

Barbara Love term ended on March 30, 2004

Vladimir Morales

Andrew Churchill newly elected on March 30, 2004, Secretary as of April, 2004

Tom Flittie newly elected on March 30, 2004

The Amherst School Committee is an elected body responsible for the public education of all children in kindergarten through grade six and of pre-school children with substantial special needs in our community. The Committee meets regularly on the third Tuesday of each month and welcomes citizen participation at each meeting. The members of this committee also serve as Amherst's members of the Regional School Committee which has responsibility for the educational programs for children in grades seven through twelve.

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Student enrollment as of October 1, 2003 was:

<u>GRADE</u>	<u>STUDENTS</u>
Pre K	62
K	178
1	210
2	192
3	203
4	208
5	220
6	<u>205</u>
TOTAL	1,478

Enrollment for 2003-2004 decreased by 56 students compared to the previous year. Eighteen children from Amherst attended other school districts under the School Choice program.

Primary goals for the Amherst Schools are as follows:

1. developing and maintaining an up-to-date, innovative, multicultural, academically challenging curriculum that promotes high standards and success for all students
2. providing creative, multi-faceted instruction that maintains high standards, engages all students, and enables all students to be successful learners
3. making all students feel fully welcome and a part of our schools, regardless of race, class, gender, language, religion, sexuality, culture, academic success, or physical abilities
4. eliminating the achievement gap among students from different racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds
5. addressing the demands and opportunities facing our schools as a result of the rapid growth in the use of technology throughout our society

6. increasing communication and collaboration among the district's stakeholders – students, parents, teachers, staff, administrators, and the larger community – and using parents and the community more effectively as educational resources
7. hiring and retaining a high quality teaching and administrative staff
8. equipping and maintaining school buildings to provide healthy, accessible, modern learning environments that support the achievement of our mission
9. sustaining a physically and emotionally safe environment in our schools for students and staff.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

This was the first year of leadership by Superintendent Dr. Jere Hochman. The Superintendent concentrated on learning about our district and its students, identifying what is working well and how to build on district strengths. Principal activities during the 2003-2004 school year included the following:

- On September 29, Dr. Hochman facilitated a World Café, bringing together over 200 school and community individuals interested in equity and social justice issues.
- Due to the unusually wet weather conditions during the summer of 2003, mold issues appeared at Wildwood School, which required significant remediation. Much of the clean-up work was performed by district custodial and maintenance staff. Some of the work was outsourced. Town funds were used to offset the unexpected cost to the schools of the required cleanup.
- Significant effort was focused on implementing a structured English immersion program for fall, as required by passage of the UNZ referendum in November 2002. The changes required (a) a full immersion program in kindergarten, supported by bilingual paraprofessionals in target languages (Spanish and Chinese) and immersion teachers; (b) intensive pullout instruction for 90-120 minutes for Beginners in Grades 1-6, with smaller amounts for Intermediate and Advanced English Language Learners; and (c) classroom teachers, with in-class support from immersion teachers and/or LAU tutors, to be the primary teachers of children in Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Health. Significant staff training was conducted by Debbie Zacarian, Director of the English Language Learner's Program.
- A group was formed in the fall to conduct a feasibility study for the implementation of a dual-language program. Work on the possibility of providing such a program will continue during the 2004-2005 school year.
- A mid-cycle review of the Special Education program in Amherst and Region was conducted in September 2003. While there were many positive remarks in the report, the investigator found that the district needs to be more consistent in the use of certain forms and more thorough in the documentation of procedures. Corrective action has been taken to remedy the situation.

- MCAS scores for spring 2003 were slightly lower than the prior year, particularly in Grade 4 math. Scores for Amherst students, however, were higher than the state average. Student scores on the Terra Nova test, which is administered to third and sixth graders, showed improvement in almost every area.
- Chartwells, a food services management company, completed their first year providing food services for all district schools. A Food Services Advisory Committee met throughout the year to guide the work of Chartwells, including providing advice about student nutrition awareness. Lunch prices remain unchanged.
- A subcommittee of teachers and administrators met during the year to develop guiding principles for professional development which contribute to the learning of all students. The principles include those that are results-oriented and transformative, collaborative and collegial, those which connect current theory to practice, are responsive to students' ever-changing needs, are sustained, continuous, and ongoing and those which are designed to promote active learning.
- Based on the five core propositions identified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the Framework for Professional Practice, a team of teachers and administrators developed draft teaching standards for the district. The standards are intended to guide teaching as well as professional and personal relationships with students, colleagues, and the community at large. The domains of teaching addressed by these standards are Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities.
- An FY 05 budget which represented a 4.84% increase over FY 04 was approved by Town Meeting. It included about \$160,000 diverted from capital funds and was supported by an override in the amount of \$2,000,000 in the spring. Even so, significant cuts had to be made to the budget including reductions to the Hitchcock Center, supplies, equipment, library paraprofessionals and other staffing, the Homework Club, staff development, and after-school programming.
- It is expected that Fort River and Wildwood Schools will be renovated within the next few years. A comprehensive plan is being developed for each of the schools.
- Nick Yaffe was appointed permanent principal of Mark's Meadow School. Karen Lowe was appointed Interim Principal of Wildwood School for the 2004-2005 school year.
- Two members of the School Committee, Elaine Brighty and Alisa Brewer, served on the Amherst Joint Capital Planning Committee.